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**THEMATIC  
COUNTRY REVIEWS**



# APPRENTICESHIP REVIEW **CYPRUS**

Adding value: rethinking apprenticeships







CYPRUS



# Apprenticeship review CYPRUS

## Adding value: rethinking apprenticeships

THEMATIC COUNTRY REVIEWS

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The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training, skills and qualifications. We provide information, research, analyses and evidence on vocational education and training, skills and qualifications for policy-making in the EU Member States.

Cedefop was originally established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75. This decision was repealed in 2019 by Regulation (EU) 2019/128 establishing Cedefop as a Union Agency with a renewed mandate.

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# Foreword

There is broad consensus in Europe that apprenticeships can help young people make smoother transitions from school to employment and address labour market imbalances. As highlighted by the European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships (Council of the European Union, 2018b), several conditions are necessary to establish good quality apprenticeship schemes.

In supporting European and national policy-making and cooperation on apprenticeships, Cedefop has gained significant knowledge and insights into the key factors affecting apprenticeship in Member States by studying the national contexts through thematic country reviews on apprenticeships in nine countries (Cedefop, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2018a) (¹). Cedefop's cross-nation overview on apprenticeships also examined 30 apprenticeship schemes in 24 countries (Cedefop, 2018b). We share this wealth of information in our publications and online databases (²).

This publication presents findings from our apprenticeship review in Cyprus. Transfer of responsibility for apprenticeship to the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2015 created potential for change and improvement. Cedefop's reviews take an inclusive, participatory and iterative approach based on a common analytical framework, working closely with national stakeholders. The review identifies strengths and enabling factors in current arrangements and suggests actions to address the challenges that Cyprus faces.

Feedback from our national partners suggests that the review helped clarify views and shape policies. The open dialogue held throughout the review process indicates that ministries and social partners are open to discussion; consensus and synergy are important to ensure quality apprenticeships.

Reviewing countries' apprenticeships has proved mutually rewarding. Our view is that the information gathered will help not only the countries reviewed, but also encourage other countries to reflect on practice and reform for better apprenticeships.

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(¹) Belgium – French Community, Greece, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia and Sweden.

(²) <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/apprenticeship-schemes>

Cedefop's team has been following policy developments closely in all the countries reviewed. We will continue to do so by organising policy learning activities, to enable Member States and European stakeholders to learn from each other, and share experiences to establish high-quality apprenticeships in their national contexts.

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A close-up photograph of two construction workers. A man with glasses and a woman are both wearing white hard hats and blue collared shirts. They are looking off to the side with serious expressions. The background is blurred.

# Executive summary

# Executive summary

Through its new modern apprenticeship (NMA) (*νέα σύγχρονη μαθητεία* in Greek), Cyprus aims to extend and improve the quality of its work-based learning and apprenticeship. This is a priority in the country's national lifelong learning strategy 2014-20 (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus, 2014).

The key message of this review is that as Cyprus considers updating its apprenticeship legislation, decisions need to be made on the role apprenticeship is expected to play in the country's education and training system. Although the NMA has done much to improve apprenticeships, it is a programme that provides apprenticeships for disadvantaged learners. To make apprenticeship a mainstream learning option at upper secondary level that is attractive to a wide group of learners, more fundamental and wide-ranging changes to the NMA are needed, particularly at the core apprenticeship level.

Cyprus has a long history of apprenticeship (the current Apprenticeship Law dates from 1966). However, most vocational education and training (VET) at upper secondary level is provided by technical schools. Attributed, in part, to the strong cultural preference that favours general secondary education (followed by higher education) over VET, participation by students in upper secondary VET is low; around 17% compared to the EU average of 49% (European Commission, 2018b).

The NMA was introduced in the 2012/13 academic year to address the weaknesses of the previous 'old' apprenticeship system, such as: low prestige; no recognised certification on completion; lack of clarity over governance; low industry participation; and operational problems, such as inadequate materials and insufficient support to apprentices. The NMA has two levels:

- (a) preparatory apprenticeships, to develop basic skills and creative talents of students aged 14 to 16 who have not completed compulsory lower secondary education;
- (b) core apprenticeships (the focus of this review), providing courses of three academic years that combine school-based education with work-based practical training for students who have either completed compulsory education or a preparatory apprenticeship.

In 2015, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) took overall responsibility for the NMA with a mandate to improve its quality and relevance to labour market needs (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus, 2015a). Changes have been made since.

The MoEC has developed new curricula for preparatory and core apprenticeships. Links with the labour market and core apprenticeships are being strengthened. In car mechanics and electrical installations curricula are being aligned with vocational qualifications awarded by the Human Resources Development Authority (HRDA). Numbers of placements in companies have increased and students at both levels receive greater support from social workers, educational psychologists and career counsellors. From the 2018/19 school year, financial support is provided to cover apprentices' transport and meal expenses during training at the workplace. Information for learners and employers about apprenticeship has been improved and made more widely available. Completion of a core apprenticeship now leads to a certificate of completion of apprenticeship, and a pathway to further education through the NMA has been opened. Those completing the core apprenticeship can move to an evening vocational school and, after two years (instead of the four required in the school-based programmes), receive a formal upper secondary qualification that gives access to post-secondary VET or higher education.

However, by retaining the rationale, principles and target group of the 'old' apprenticeship system, the original intention of using the NMA to widen the scope of apprenticeship to prepare young skilled employees seems to have lost ground to the need for social inclusion of disadvantaged learners. Under the NMA, apprenticeships continue to be seen as a second-chance alternative pathway for the education, training and development of young people aged 14 to 21 who withdrew from the formal education system.

The certificate of completion of apprenticeship is a professional, not an educational qualification. It is not widely recognised on the labour market and only gives access to some occupations under certain conditions. The NMA also remains small: it is only delivered by six technical schools; the preparatory apprenticeship has 77 students and the core apprenticeship 160 apprentices in five specialisations (Korelli et al., 2019). Finding companies willing to take apprentices remains a major challenge, not least because the young apprentices themselves are responsible for finding a placement. Implementation and quality of workplace experience are also hampered by the lack of formal requirements placed on employers.

Cedefop's review methodology takes an inclusive, participatory and collaborative approach that includes surveys of stakeholders in three consecutive rounds. The review undertook 116 interviews of apprentices and recent graduates, directors and teachers of technical schools, NMA teachers, employers providing apprenticeship places, mentors, social partners and government representatives, supplemented by round-table discussions. There was almost unanimous agreement on the need to continue to improve apprenticeships in terms of value, quality and their link to labour market needs.

However, what was less clear is the role apprenticeships are expected to play in the future. During the review two possible scenarios emerged.

Under scenario 1, the NMA would continue to be targeted exclusively at disadvantaged young people. The focus would be on continuing to improve the operational rather than strategic role of the NMA and apprenticeships, for example through:

- (a) better information for, and preparation of, potential apprentices;
- (b) improving training for teachers and other professionals to work in apprenticeship programmes taking into account the specificities of the NMA;
- (c) strengthening the implementation framework of the NMA to make it less informal;
- (d) improving incentives for employers to participate in the NMA through a balanced combination of financial and non-financial support;
- (e) providing comprehensive and multifaceted support to apprentices before, during and after their studies.

Under scenario 2, the NMA and apprenticeships would be developed into a strategic mainstream learning option at upper secondary level targeted at a wide range of learners. However, this would require concerted efforts to address traditional and deep-rooted perceptions in Cyprus about VET generally and apprenticeships specifically as inferior to general education.

The key objective would be to increase the value of apprenticeship for learners and employers. Improving the attractiveness and perceptions of apprenticeships would require the NMA to deliver positive labour market outcomes in terms of transition from school to the labour market and good job and career prospects.

In addition to the measures discussed above to improve the operation of the NMA, other more fundamental and wide-ranging measures would be needed, such as:

- (a) updating legislation and related regulations to strengthen the status of apprenticeship;
- (b) improving governance and strengthening coordination to involve a wide group of stakeholders;
- (c) involving social partners in programme design, curriculum development, and assessment, delegating a more active and responsible role to employers and their representatives;
- (d) increasing the attractiveness and value of apprenticeship through the award of recognised qualifications that provide skills and competences related to the labour market, and opportunities for further education and training.

To bring about the change outlined under scenario 2 would be challenging, but not impossible. The review identified several positive elements on which national stakeholders can build to improve apprenticeship. The status of apprenticeship in Cyprus was not always low. Up until the 1980s craftspeople qualified through apprenticeships and enrolment rates were high (Section 3.3.). There is also willingness to improve the NMA. Some employers and apprentices are positive about apprenticeship as a learning method. The MoEC and the social partners are already working together and taking active measures to make apprenticeship work. The recent success of post-secondary VET programmes in Cyprus also indicates scope for closer cooperation between the MoEC, the HRDA, employers and partners to develop quality-assured VET qualifications.

Some structures are already in place to help develop apprenticeships, such as the Apprenticeship Board and the teachers responsible for the NMA in districts. There are also mechanisms in place for social partners to provide feedback and communicate labour market needs. Earlier projects have also developed tools and guidelines to involve and support employers willing to take apprentices.

However, stakeholders in Cyprus need to decide the role that they want apprenticeship to play in the future: a limited but fundamentally important one of integrating disadvantaged learners into the labour market; or a more strategic role as a mainstream learning option at upper secondary level that is attractive to a wide group of learners, as it provides them with skills and competences that bring positive opportunities in the labour market. The different options require different but complementary approaches; either will take commitment and time.





## 1. Introduction

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

As part of their strong commitment to reducing levels of youth unemployment, the European Union (EU) and its Member States promote and support development of policies and programmes to ensure the availability of high-quality work-based learning (WBL), including apprenticeships. WBL in general and apprenticeship in particular, are seen as an effective way of improving smooth and sustainable transitions from school to work. By alternating school and work, apprentices develop practical knowledge and skills relevant to the labour market and employer needs. In apprenticeship, learners also develop professional identity and the soft skills (communication, problem-solving, judgement, leadership, flexibility, teamwork) employers often refer to as lacking when discussing skill mismatches in the labour market.

To support this aim, Cedefop is developing and systematising knowledge about apprenticeships in Member States and monitoring progress in relation to their commitments under the umbrella of the European alliance for apprenticeships (EAfA)<sup>(3)</sup>. Cedefop also supports cooperation among Member States and works with individual countries that wish to promote the development of high-quality WBL, including apprenticeships.

On 4 November 2016 Cedefop presented its project for the thematic country review (TCR) on apprenticeship in Cyprus to key stakeholders in the vocational education and training (VET) system at a preparatory meeting in the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). The project activities started in the first part of 2017 and continued until June 2018.

This report outlines the review's findings, conclusions and suggestions for action. Chapter 2 sets out the analytical framework and methodology Cedefop used for the review. Chapter 3 gives an overview of Cyprus' VET programmes, including apprenticeship. Chapter 4 presents the current situation of apprenticeship and Chapter 5 lists suggestions to improve apprenticeships in Cyprus.

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<sup>(3)</sup> Under the EAfA, stakeholders across the EU undertake initiatives to improve the quality, supply and image of apprenticeship. EAfA initiatives are funded through the European Social Fund, the *Youth employment initiative*, Erasmus+ and other EU funding mechanisms, resources and networks. Apprenticeship systems are included in the national policy plans associated with the *Youth guarantee* and the *Youth employment initiative*.



## **2.** TCR rationale and methodology

## CHAPTER 2

# TCR rationale and methodology

Cedefop's thematic country reviews on apprenticeships identify, with national stakeholders, the strengths and challenges of apprenticeship in the country and make policy suggestions on how to improve them. They also strengthen the evidence base to help policy-makers, at different levels, design and implement policies and measures for quality apprenticeships (Cedefop, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2018a).

The review methodology relies on three key aspects:

- (a) a common analytical framework setting out the characteristic features that exist, to different degrees and in various combinations, in countries with established apprenticeship systems, such as Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland. The framework has 10 areas of analysis defined by descriptors (Table A1 in the annex), which provide a reference point for data collection, analysis and reporting;
- (b) an inclusive, participatory and collaborative approach, supported by policy learning, organised at two levels:
  - (i) steering and validation: a steering group nominated by the MoEC decided the priority areas, discussed, validated and gave feedback throughout the review. Steering group members also gave interviews and participated in round tables. The steering group comprised representatives of: the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies; the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry; the Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA); the Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation (OEB); the Pan-Cyprian Federation of Labour; and the Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus;
  - (ii) stakeholder involvement: some 104 stakeholders took part in 116 interviews (Table 1). Some also participated in discussions on the strengths, weaknesses, improvement, policy and institutional and organisational implications for apprenticeship;
- (c) an evolving and iterative approach. The review relies on surveying stakeholders organised in three consecutive rounds of survey where each round has its own objectives and informs the following one(s).

The first round of interviews took place between May and September 2017; a total of 67 interviews collected information from current and graduate apprentices, directors and teachers from technical schools, teachers responsible for apprenticeship in districts, and directors and mentors from companies. The interviews covered the new modern apprenticeship (NMA) programmes for car mechanic, electrical installations, hairdressing, bakery and confectionery, carpentry and furniture production, in three districts. The first round was finalised with a round-table discussion with 10 school directors and company representatives about the positive elements and challenges of the NMA.

**Table 1. Stakeholders involved, by group and number of interviews**

Group of stakeholders	Number of persons interviewed
Apprenticeship graduates	5
Students-apprentices (with or without work placement)	21
Directors/deputy directors of technical schools	6
Teachers responsible for NMA in districts	6
Teachers from technical schools	11
Directors (or HR managers) in companies that	
- provide apprenticeships	10
- do not provide apprenticeship training	7
Employers also acting as mentors	11
Mentors in companies	7
Guidance counsellors	3
Employer organisations	6
Ministries	16
Trade union representatives	1
Pedagogical Institute	1
State agencies	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>116 (4)</b>

Source: Cedefop.

The second round of consultations took place in spring 2018; a total of 18 people were interviewed from employer organisations, chambers,

(4) A total of 12 people participated more than once in round tables due to their role.

guidance counsellors, ministerial staff, and companies that do not provide apprenticeship training. The third round took place from May to June 2018. It comprised three round tables of 21 people in total discussing possible suggestions for action. One round table was organised with social partners, a second one with the MoEC and the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus (PIC) and a third one with the ministries and State agencies responsible for the NMA.

The third round was complemented by a survey of companies to understand better why they do or do not participate in apprenticeships and what would persuade them to do so. The survey was conducted online; a total of 44 companies responded and, as this is a small sample, the results were only used for information.

The outcomes of the three rounds were integrated into this review. Round 1 and 2 findings served as basis for Chapter 4; Chapter 5 was based on findings from round 3.



### 3. Context

# Context

## 3.1. The young on the labour market

The deep economic crisis of 2008 and the following recession weakened the Cypriot labour market. Unemployment rose dramatically from 3.8% in 2008 (half the then EU-28 average) to 16.3% in 2014 at its peak. Strong economic growth in the past three years has improved the labour market. Employment is rising, mainly in the services and construction sectors. The unemployment rate, albeit lower, remains much higher than before the crisis and is among the highest in the EU <sup>(5)</sup>. Cyprus has also experienced a sharp increase in migrants and asylum seekers in recent years; about 300 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in 2016 and 2017 <sup>(6)</sup>. The proportion of foreign-born people under 15 was 8.8% in 2017, the third highest in the EU (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

The situation remains difficult for young people. Unemployment among young people (aged 15 to 24) more than quadrupled from 9% in 2008 to 38.9% at its peak in 2013 (Table 2). The proportion of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) is one of the highest in the EU (16.1% in 2017) <sup>(7)</sup>. Early school leaving also increased from 6.8% in 2014 to 8.6% in 2017, but remains below the EU average of 10.6% (European Commission, 2018b). An early school leaving rate of 18.1% for students of migrant background contrasts with that of 5.7% for native-born students.

In 2017, the employment rate of upper secondary VET graduates at 52% was the lowest in the EU and well below the European average of 76.6% (European Commission, 2018b). Labour market relevance of young people's skills is a concern. New active labour market policy measures (ALMPs) as part of the *Youth guarantee* introduced for young people have been more successful than measures for other vulnerable groups, but participation is low (Council of the EU, 2018a).

<sup>(5)</sup> It is the fifth highest in the EU-28 in 2017, after Greece, Spain, Italy and Croatia.

<sup>(6)</sup> Most refugee children follow general education (European Commission, 2018b).

<sup>(7)</sup> [Ifsi\_neet\_a], last update 16.1.2019: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

Unemployment rates vary according to level of educational attainment. In 2017, unemployment was 13.3% for people aged 25 to 64 with below lower secondary education <sup>(8)</sup>, compared to 10.2% for those with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, and 8.8% for those with tertiary education <sup>(9)</sup>.

**Table 2. Unemployment rate in Cyprus and the EU, by age, 2008-17**

Country	Years									
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Young people (15-24 years old)</b>										
CY	9.0	13.8	16.6	22.4	27.7	38.9	36.0	32.8	29.1	24.7
EU-28	15.6	19.9	21.0	21.7	23.2	23.7	22.2	20.3	18.7	16.8
<b>All population (15-64 years old)</b>										
CY	3.8	5.5	6.5	8.1	12.1	16.1	16.3	15.2	13.2	11.3
EU-28	7.1	9.0	9.7	9.8	10.6	11.0	10.4	9.6	8.7	7.8

Source: Eurostat (2019a). Employment and unemployment data 2019 (labour force survey), [lfsa\_urqaed].

Since the 2000s, Cyprus' economy has mainly been service-oriented, including tourism, financial services and real estate. The tertiary sector accounts for around 84.7% of GDP (Korelli et al, 2019). The tourism boom and the recovery of real estate and associated construction activity account for most investment. The tourism boom has also affected the transport, trade, food and accommodation sectors. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 99.9% of all enterprises in the non-financial business sector in 2017 (Table 3). They employ 84.1% of all employees compared to 66.4% in the EU as a whole. Micro enterprises comprise 93.1% of SMEs and employ 40.6% of all employees.

<sup>(8)</sup> Apprenticeship addresses young people at risk of early leaving from lower secondary education.

<sup>(9)</sup> Eurostat (2019b). Unemployment rates by sex, age and educational attainment level (%) [lfsa\_urqaed].

**Table 3. Cyprus and the EU: enterprises by size (2017)**

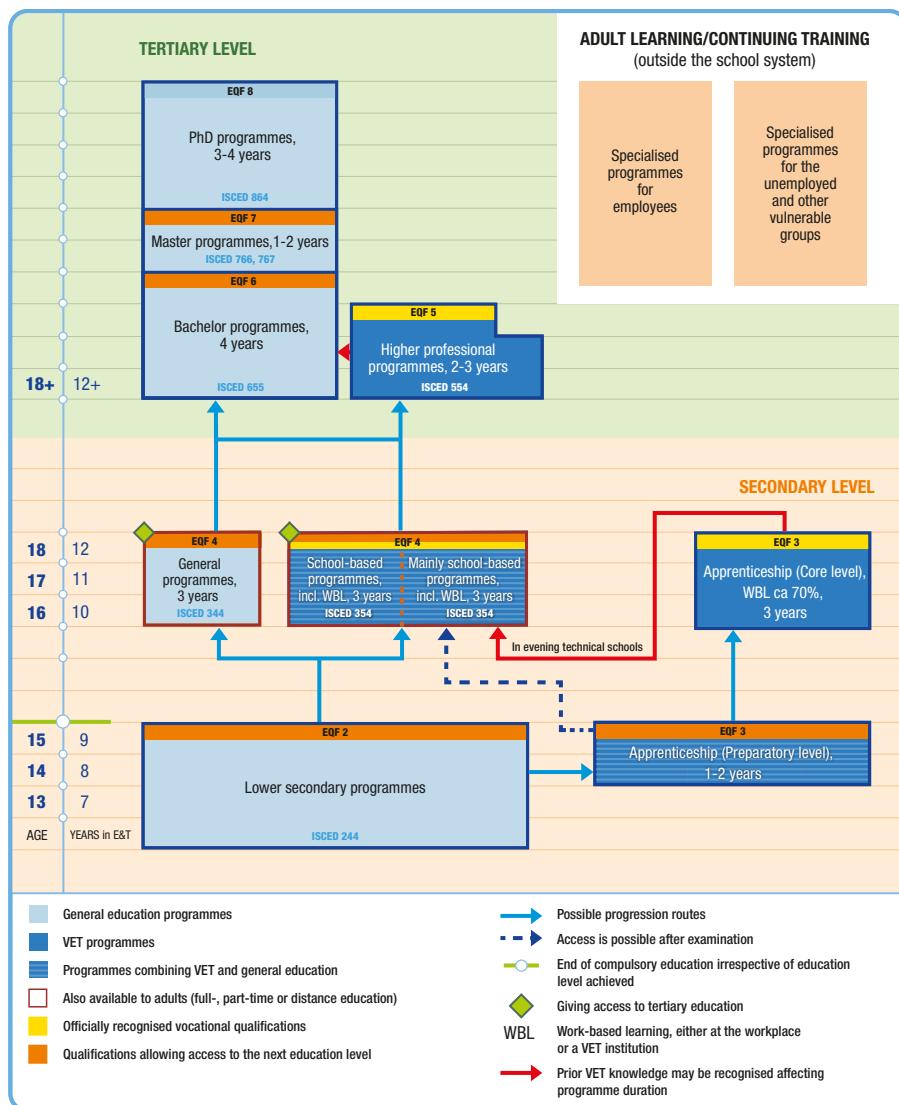
Type of enterprises	Number of enterprises			Number of employees		
	Cyprus		EU-28	Cyprus		EU-28
	Number	%	%	Number	%	%
Micro (fewer than 10 employees)	47 840	93.6	93.1	94 126	40.6	29.4
Small (10-49 employees)	2 802	5.5	5.8	55 584	24.0	20.0
Medium-sized (50-249 employees)	427	0.8	0.9	45 482	19.6	17.0
<b>Total SMEs</b>	<b>51 069</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>99.8</b>	<b>195 192</b>	<b>84.1</b>	<b>66.4</b>
Large (250 and more employees)	66	0.1	0.2	36 858	15.9	33.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>51 135</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>232 050</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: European Commission: SME performance review web page: [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/performance-review\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/performance-review_en)

### 3.2. Vocational education and training in Cyprus

Education in Cyprus covers pre-primary to postgraduate levels. Pre-primary, primary (grades one to six), and lower secondary (grades seven to nine) are compulsory up to the age of 15 (Figure 1). Public expenditure on education at 6.5% of GDP is high.

Figure 1. The Cypriot education and training system



NB: ISCED P-2011.

Source: Cedefop (2019).

Educational attainment is also high. Some 55.8%<sup>(10)</sup> of the population aged 30 to 34 have completed tertiary level studies, compared to the EU average of 39.9% in 2017; some 42.5% of the population aged 25 to 64 have completed tertiary education compared to 31.4% in the EU-28 as a whole. Participation in upper secondary VET, however, is low at only 17% in 2016, compared to the EU average of 49% (European Commission, 2018b). This can partly be attributed to a strong cultural preference in Cyprus for general secondary education, followed by higher education. A large proportion of young people leave Cyprus to pursue higher education overseas.

VET is available at several levels:

- (a) upper secondary level technical schools, including evening technical schools (*εσπερινές τεχνικές σχολές*) and afternoon and evening classes for adults; theoretical and practical programmes are available and both last three years;
- (b) post-secondary VET institutes (*Μεταλυκειακά ίνστιτούτα επαγγελματικής εκπαίδευσης και κατάρτισης*) from the academic year 2012/13, accredited in 2017;
- (c) four public institutes/colleges, under the jurisdiction of various ministries and several private colleges provide VET at tertiary level.

The new modern apprenticeship (NMA) (*νέα σύγχρονη μαθητεία*) provides an alternative education pathway to students who have either successfully completed compulsory education<sup>(11)</sup> or successfully completed a preparatory apprenticeship.

Vocational training is available for employed and unemployed people, including groups at risk of exclusion from the labour market, through a mixture of public and private provision, such as colleges, training institutions, consultancy firms and enterprises (Korelli et al, 2019), coordinated by the HRDA (Box 1).

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<sup>(10)</sup> The national target of 46% by 2020 was exceeded in 2012 with 49.9%.

<sup>(11)</sup> This might include students who interrupt their studies in lyceum or technical schools, i.e. in post-compulsory education.

### Box 1. More sources on VET in Cyprus

More details on the Cypriot vocational education and training are available in:

- Korelli, Y; Kyriacou-Liveri, C; Theocharous, A. (2019). *Vocational education and training in Europe – Cyprus*. Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe reports (2018). [http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/Vocational\\_Education\\_Training\\_Europe\\_Cyprus\\_2018\\_Cedefop\\_RerferNet.pdf](http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2019/Vocational_Education_Training_Europe_Cyprus_2018_Cedefop_RerferNet.pdf)
- Cedefop (2018). *Developments in vocational education and training policy in 2015-17: Cyprus*. Cedefop monitoring and analysis of VET policies. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/vet-policy-developments-cyprus-2017>
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VET is important to the national lifelong learning strategy 2014-20 (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus, 2014), which is underpinned by the *Strategic plan for the system of technical and vocational education and training 2015-20*, approved by the Council of Ministers on 15 April 2015 (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus, 2015b). Reforms outlined in these documents cover all public VET programmes, including the NMA. They aim to improve the quality, attractiveness and relevance of VET and contribute to improving lifelong learning in Cyprus. From 2016/17 onwards, the amount of practical training in enterprises for students in technical schools has increased.

## 3.3. Apprenticeship in Cyprus

### 3.3.1. Historical snapshot

Cyprus has a long history of apprenticeship; the current law on apprenticeship dates back to 1966. Some respondents commented in the interviews that apprenticeships had contributed to developing crafts in some parts of Cyprus in the 1960-70s. Over time apprenticeship changed and has been

under reform since the 2000s. Numbers of students in apprenticeships fell from a historical high of 1 367 in 1980/81 to 365 in 2006/07. To date, the NMA is only a small programme with 160 apprentices in five specialisations in core apprenticeship and 77 in preparatory apprenticeship in 2017/18 (Korelli et al, 2019). NMA programmes are being implemented in six technical schools.

In 2006, the Council of Ministers appointed the Cyprus Productivity Centre (CPC), a unit of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MoLWSI) to be in charge of implementing apprenticeship. At that time, apprenticeship was a two-year initial vocational education and training (IVET) programme for young people who had not completed compulsory secondary education. It provided practical training in an enterprise and theoretical training in school for technical occupations. The HRDA subsidised apprentice wages for the two days per week spent at the workplace. On completion, apprentices received a certificate of apprenticeship completion. If they passed the tests set by the Joint Apprenticeship Committee, apprentices were awarded a professional training certificate.

In 2007, Cyprus' lifelong learning strategy 2007-13 recognised apprenticeship reform as necessary to meet the needs of early school leavers and the labour market (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus, 2007). The strategy highlighted the following weaknesses of the 'old' apprenticeship system:

- (a) lack of prestige, as apprenticeships are associated with second chance schools to complete secondary education, and low participation of industry;
- (b) no recognition of the certificate of apprenticeship completion;
- (c) lack of clarity regarding the responsibilities of the two ministries overseeing apprenticeships;
- (d) lack of flexibility in programme provision;
- (e) operational problems, such as limited number of specialisations, lack of educational materials, insufficient support to apprentices, inadequate on-the-job inspection and on-the-job training, and low wages for apprentices.

The CPC's proposal for the 'new' apprenticeship was approved in 2007 (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus, 2007). The NMA became operational in the 2012/13 school year.

The rationale for the NMA was to overcome the weaknesses of the old system. The NMA was conceived as an alternative pathway to educate, train and help the development of young people between 14 and 21 who

have withdrawn from the formal education system. According to its mission, the NMA aims to create and develop competences that characterise the modern technician in any sector or specialisation: interpersonal and social competences; creative thinking; and the technical competences. The NMA was jointly funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cyprus Government.

The NMA is not part of compulsory education. It has two levels: preparatory and core apprenticeships, targeting two distinct groups of students:

- (a) the preparatory apprenticeship, (*Προπαρασκευαστική μαθητεία*) (ISCED 2, EQF level 2) targets students between 14 and 16 who have not completed compulsory lower secondary education. It does not involve employment or occupational specialisation, but provides an opportunity for students to develop basic skills and creative talents. It gradually introduces students to the labour market, gives them a taste of what VET would be like, and helps them choose a specialisation when they go on to the core apprenticeship. On completion, students do not acquire a formal qualification or certificate; instead, they can continue to the core apprenticeship or return to school and complete the compulsory education in a secondary school (*γυμνάσιο*). The preparatory apprenticeship lasts one or two years, depending on the student's level and age;
- (b) the core apprenticeship (*Κεντρικός κορμός μαθητείας*) (ISCED 2A, EQF level 3) targets students younger than 18 at the time of application who have successfully completed either compulsory education or a preparatory apprenticeship. The core apprenticeship lasts three academic years. Apprentices alternate between school-based education (general education, theoretical vocational training and laboratory lessons) and company-based practical training.

The core apprenticeship is the focus of Cedefop's review and this report.

In 2015, in line with the strategic plan for the system of technical and vocational education and training 2015-20, and following dialogue between the MoEC and the MoLWSI, the Council of Ministers approved a comprehensive framework for improving the quality of the NMA and strengthening its relevance to labour market needs (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus, 2015a). Overall responsibility for the design and implementation of the NMA was given to the MoEC's Department of secondary technical and vocational education (*Διεύθυνση μέσης τεχνικής και επαγγελματικής εκπαίδευσης*). There were no major changes in the

rationale and principles of the NMA and it is in this framework that it has been operating since (Table A.2 in the annex). The first NMA graduates completed their course in 2018.

### 3.3.2. Developments beyond the timeframe of the review

During and after the review, the MoEC has continued to work on several actions to improve the NMA's attractiveness and quality.

For the preparatory apprenticeship, new curricula were developed for almost all subjects (Greek, mathematics, physics, arts, computer science). The MoEC set admission criteria and introduced a support team of three specialists (social worker, educational psychologist and career counsellor) for students in need.

In the 2018/19 school year, new curricula were developed for mathematics and Greek for the core apprenticeship based on apprentices' level and needs, and the basic knowledge required for the specialisation. MoEC inspectors, in cooperation with PIC inspectors, organised seminars for all teachers of Greek and mathematics who teach apprentices and sought to recruit additional teachers specifically for the NMA. The MoEC has started developing new curricula for car mechanics and electrical installations specialists aligned with the HRDA vocational qualifications. A template for a logbook is also being piloted.

With support from employer organisations and chambers, the number of apprentices without company placement has been significantly reduced. For those who had difficulty working in companies, more hours of school-training were provided with the teacher of the related specialisation.

From the 2018/19 school year, the MoEC will provide financial support to all apprentices to cover their transport and meal expenses for the three days of training at the workplace.

Following an Erasmus+ project, a web portal has been set up to provide guidance and information to learners and employers about apprenticeship<sup>(12)</sup>. The MoEC will be responsible for updating the information on the portal in cooperation with employer organisations. All partners signed a sustainability agreement to continue supporting apprenticeship for at least three years after the project was completed in December 2018.

The MoEC also plans to update the respective legislative basis.

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<sup>(12)</sup> [http://www.moec.gov.cy/mtee/smeek\\_genikes\\_plirofories.html](http://www.moec.gov.cy/mtee/smeek_genikes_plirofories.html) [in Greek].



## **4.** New modern apprenticeship: current arrangements, enablers and challenges

## CHAPTER 4

# New modern apprenticeship: current arrangements, enablers and challenges

The review analysed the NMA programmes using Cedefop's framework (Table A.1. in the annex). This chapter presents the review's findings, which are based on desk research, interviews, round table discussions with stakeholders and an online survey of employers.

The steering group selected the following priority areas <sup>(13)</sup> for review:

- (a) developing a flexible apprenticeship system with regard to its governance, involving the social partners in updating training content;
- (b) engaging employers in developing and supporting apprenticeships;
- (c) support to companies, both financial and non-financial;
- (d) quality assurance.

Interviews and round table discussions also covered other areas.

Despite the balanced selection of types of stakeholder and the large number of interviewees, the opinions expressed are those of individuals and may not necessarily be representative of the whole population. However, they give an indication of the current situation of the NMA in Cyprus and help identify some critical areas for decision and action.

This section examines the design and implementation the NMA aiming to identify actions to improve it.

## 4.1. Design: distinguishing features and place in the education and training system

The NMA does not fully correspond to the distinguishing features of apprenticeship detailed in the review's analytical framework, as its graduates do not receive a recognised qualification in terms of education or access to the labour market:

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<sup>(13)</sup> The priorities were based on areas 3, 4, 6, 8 and 9 of the analytical framework (annex).

- (a) the core apprenticeship is a three-year programme in selected specialisations where students alternate between training with an employer and training in a technical/vocational school, usually for three and two days respectively per week;
- (b) students have to find an employer and sign an apprenticeship contract (*Σύμβαση μαθητείας*), under which the employer pays a monthly remuneration for the time spent in the company;
- (c) there is an understanding among some stakeholders that companies are responsible for the company-based part of the programme. However, there are no requirements of, or reference documents for, employers on learning content.

The NMA holds a specific place in Cyprus' education and training system. It is offered alongside secondary education but does not lead to a secondary education certificate.

The rationale and function of the NMA are to: provide young people with vocational education and prepare them to enter the labour market in an occupation; and provide enterprises with skilled employees. The NMA is designed to link to education policies to prevent early school leaving and to employment policies for youth employment. In contrast to its design as a dual track at level 3 of the national qualifications framework (NQF), the NMA seems to be implemented as a social safety net and a second chance route for learners who are at risk of dropout or have dropped out from compulsory education and those who do not plan to continue to secondary or higher education.

Typically, apprenticeships are expected to prepare an individual to enter a profession or occupation; it is not clear whether apprenticeships fulfil this role in Cyprus. On completion of a core apprenticeship, students receive a certificate of apprenticeship completion, on condition that they have met all requirements, including work placement in an enterprise. The certificate is supposed to give access to some regulated occupations; however, the interviews have not demonstrated that this is the case. Apprenticeships appear to be oriented more towards providing general work experience and, by implication, accumulation of skills for employability, rather than providing specific vocational skills that might grant entry to a particular profession.

There are mixed views among stakeholders and practitioners on whether the NMA is part of the formal education system, given that it does not lead to a recognised formal qualification or the equivalent of a school leaving certificate. Various groups of stakeholders point to a certain amount of confusion about the NMA's purpose and expectations of it, leading to

misunderstandings and, at times, mutual complaints. Some teachers think that the NMA is inferior to other programmes in the education system. Transferring responsibility of the NMA to the MoEC is an opportunity to strengthen the programme and its links to the formal system, as it is now recognised by the government and employer organisations and is a required qualification for some occupations.

Horizontal transition between secondary education pathways and vertical to further specialisation or higher levels of education is difficult, if not impossible. The certificate of completion of apprenticeship does not give access to tertiary or higher vocational education programmes.

In principle, on completing the NMA programme and passing the relevant admission exams, young people can continue their education in an evening technical school. It will take them another two years, instead of the four required for a regular programme, to complete it and they will receive an upper secondary education certificate that gives access to post-secondary VET or higher education. In reality, young people graduating from an NMA do not continue to post-secondary VET or tertiary education, but there is no systematic information about NMA graduate pathways. Graduates do not return to lyceums or technical schools for school-based education.

The NMA does not have separate curricula; it uses the same ones as the technical schools. For example, the Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education, guided by the PIC has developed seven new curricula and analytical programmes for: car mechanics; plumbing and central heating; welding and metal constructions; bakery and confectionery; carpentry and furniture making; electrical installations, and home appliances technicians. Curricula are defined in terms of the knowledge, skills and competences to be acquired each year. However, the curricula are not exclusive to the NMA. They are also used in the technical school programmes for these occupations, and there are no guidelines on how to adapt them for the NMA. Consequently, there is little information on what students are expected to learn at the workplace. Some VET teachers reported that having to accommodate students' needs makes following the curriculum to the letter difficult. Some apprentices confirmed that they often do not learn enough in school workshops due to lack of time or access.

According to the MoEC, apprenticeship can be offered in about 40 occupations, if there is high demand from students, but current demand is low. The NMA programme is small and, consequently, not visible enough. The NMA offer is limited to a few occupations and sectors. Although there are employment and labour market forecasting activities in Cyprus, they do

not apply directly to NMA programmes. Supply is based on enrolment and not labour market needs. When a minimum number of apprentices enrol in an NMA programme at school, the MoEC creates and defines the number of classes for technical specialisations, taking into account the geographical distribution of apprentices and VET providers. If there is demand for a new specialisation, the MoEC will create a working group to develop a syllabus/education programme, consisting of a VET teacher, a representative from the relevant industry and an MoEC expert, or an external expert with knowledge of developing syllabuses/education programmes.

At the design stage in 2007, the aim was to link NMA curricula to the system of vocational qualifications (SVQ) (<sup>14</sup>). However, although this link is assumed, it seems not to be the case. No respondent confirmed this: VET teachers were not familiar with these qualifications standards or any other occupational profiles. Further, for some occupations, such as car mechanic, the NMA programme is of a lower level than the vocational qualification.

#### **4.1.1. Potential and perceived value of apprenticeship**

Some school directors believe that the strength of the NMA – if properly implemented – lies in deeper links between school and industry, theory and practice and in the opportunity the programme provides for vulnerable young people to continue studying instead of dropping out. Some VET teachers agreed that the NMA combines theory and practice and enables young people to return to education, specialise in an occupation and gain work experience. Apprentices felt that the NMA was a chance for them to gain practical experience in companies and deal with actual work problems.

Directors and mentors from companies also believe that the NMA provides young people with an opportunity to gain practical experience in a workplace and develop professional and personal competences. However, most company directors said that they did not intend to recruit the apprentices at the end of their apprenticeship. They gave various reasons, the main one being that apprentices need additional training to perform in the occupation. They thought that the NMA does not meet company skill needs. Employers/mentors confirmed the directors' opinions.

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(<sup>14</sup>) The SVQ is managed by the HRDA. The SVQ has five levels; its qualifications give access to professions and are also included in the NQF. In general, the SVQ is based on occupational standards, which means that the certificate of apprenticeship completion allows access to several regulated occupations (e.g. construction managers, electricians), provided all other relevant legislative requirements are met. This is important because graduates from a profession included in the SVQ can have knowledge and skills acquired from work experience assessed and certified, and learners have a chance to upgrade their professional qualifications.

Companies that do not train apprentices largely supported the philosophy of apprenticeship and thought that organising learning in school and in a company can benefit the country. They thought that apprenticeship in Cyprus is unfairly judged and that it is an alternative way of employing people who want to obtain a qualification. Social partners believe that through the NMA companies can prepare the employees they need and hire them after graduation, provided companies invest in training them and graduates are motivated to learn.

Some VET teachers thought that the NMA is inferior compared to other education programmes and that young people and society are not well informed about the NMA. They mentioned the following NMA weaknesses:

- (a) a difficulty for graduates to continue in upper secondary education;
- (b) the low value of the certificate compared to other VET programmes;
- (c) a lack of companies hiring apprentices;
- (d) low motivation of apprentices in school.

Apprentices felt that they were prepared and had the knowledge and skills required for finding a job in a small company. However, they also felt that big companies required expertise and skills related to the latest technologies and working methods that they had not yet learned. Most apprentices also reported that they needed more practical (technical) training at school and English-speaking skills to communicate with foreign clients during their apprenticeship. Apprenticeship graduates indicated that they understood clearly what their profession/specialisation required. Most graduates expressed interest in staying with the company at the end of their apprenticeship but their military obligations (national service, mandatory for men at the age of 17 or 18) made this impossible. Graduates also expressed a wish to continue in the same company, field or work, after their military service. They also expressed a need to improve their confidence and communication skills in the workplace and felt that additional technical training would be useful. Some apprentices preferred the NMA as a way to learn and earn money to support their families, who were often in need.

## 4.2. Design: governance and the role of the social partners

The legal basis for the NMA is the Apprenticeship Law dating back to 1966 (*Ο περί Μαθητευομένων Νόμος του 1966*). Almost all stakeholders agreed on the need to update the regulatory framework for apprenticeship to improve its governance and operation and strengthen its link to labour market needs for skilled labour. Some teachers also wanted an update of school regulations. The MoEC is developing a new legal framework to reflect the ongoing reforms.

In theory, responsibility for the NMA is divided among ministries, social partners, technical schools, companies and apprentices. Stakeholder interviews hinted that the current legislative provisions for apprenticeship are not entirely clear at implementation level.

Since 2015, overall responsibility for the NMA lies with the MoEC. Specifically, the MoEC's Directorate of Technical and Vocational Education decides, coordinates and oversees implementation of the NMA. An Apprenticeship Officer in the MoEC is in charge of the NMA. Apart from the NMA, the Directorate is also in charge of secondary technical and vocational education, evening technical schools, afternoon and evening classes of technical schools and post-secondary VET institutes. It therefore has a good country-wide overview of VET. Most interaction among stakeholders takes place through the MoEC.

The MoEC appoints teachers responsible for NMA per district (Box 2). These teachers coordinate and oversee implementation of apprenticeship in their district, maintain contact with employers and apprenticeship inspectors and sometimes help apprentices to find placements.

School directors seem little involved in NMA implementation, with the exception of school administrative issues. Schools mainly communicate with the MoEC, so the overall distribution of responsibilities among stakeholders at practitioner level was not clarified in the interviews.

## Box 2. Teachers and the NMA

Teachers are generally highly qualified in Cyprus; they are public servants hired by the MoEC. Teachers of theoretical training in school (secondary technical and vocational education – STVE) are university graduates with a minimum qualification of a bachelor degree. A few VET teachers, employed at technical schools, hold a diploma or similar qualification from colleges or similar establishments of tertiary education (with courses of at least three years) and are appointed at a lower salary scale. The same teachers work with NMA students. If there are no teachers in a specialisation, the MoEC will recruit the required professionals (*Korelli and Mourouzides, 2016*).

As implementation of the NMA in technical schools is relatively new, some school directors and VET teachers responsible for NMA felt that teachers in schools are not adequately prepared to work with apprentices; in contrast, others thought they were. Some respondents felt that continuing professional development of VET teachers was inadequate and expressed concerns about teachers' competences, especially digital competences.

Following development of new curricula, a training programme was implemented for preparatory apprenticeship teachers. In 2018/19 <sup>(a)</sup>, the MoEC, working with the PIC, provided seminars to teachers on working with apprentices, and recruited additional teachers specifically for the NMA.

<sup>(a)</sup> These actions took place after Cedefop's review activities were concluded.

Source: Cedefop (2019).

In line with current legislation, the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance (MoLWSI) defines the minimum apprenticeship remuneration based on the social security regulation. The MoLWSI annually appoints <sup>(15)</sup> apprenticeship inspectors to inspect companies providing practical training. Inspectors are VET teachers by profession and have similar duties to VET school inspectors. Inspection is usually performed through monthly on-site visits to the apprentices' workplaces. Apprenticeship inspectors are the

<sup>(15)</sup> Apprenticeship inspectors are teachers in technical schools thus, also MoEC employees.

contact points for apprentices if issues should arise concerning their school education or workplace experience.

At national level, the Apprenticeship Board (*Συμβούλιο Μαθητείας*) supports the MoEC in designing and implementing the NMA. It is an important collective body bringing together representatives from the MoEC, the MoLWSI, the General Directorate for European Programmes, Coordination and Development, technical schools, employer and employee organisations and the HRDA. Apprenticeship committees – one per district foreseen in the legislation – were not in place at the time of the review.

Cyprus has a long-standing tradition of tripartite consultation between government, trade unions and employer organisations, as well as of social dialogue. Social partners are involved in an advisory and consultative capacity in various initiatives and projects related to the development of the NMA, such as Erasmus+ projects (Box 3).

### Box 3. Projects on apprenticeship in Cyprus

#### National authorities for apprenticeship: companies as sustainable partners for apprenticeship in Greece and Cyprus

The CPC and the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry took part with Greece and Germany, in the project *National authorities for apprenticeship: companies as sustainable partners for apprenticeship in Greece and Cyprus*. The project aimed to improve VET quality, particularly apprenticeship in Cyprus and Greece with the know-how from Germany.

Based on an analysis of the situation in Cyprus and Greece, the partners developed a guide on:

- apprenticeship procedures for companies;
- the role of trainers in VET;
- requirements for companies as VET providers.

More information at: <https://naagrcy.oaed.gr/>





### Apprenticeship helpdesk for SMEs

Chambers of Commerce and Industry from Limassol and Paphos, the Cyprus Confederation of Professional Craftsmen and Shopkeepers supported by Intercollege and the MoEC implemented the *Apprenticeship helpdesk for SMEs* project, which created a helpdesk service staffed by the three partner chambers to provide tailored support to member businesses wishing to take apprentices. The project also helped develop information material for enterprises and learners (the MoEC was in charge of the latter), such as the:

- *Learners' guide to apprenticeship;*
- *SME guide to apprenticeships.*

More information at: <https://www.apphelp4smes.eu/>

### Apprenticeship coaches for SMEs

Cyprus took part in a project by chambers of commerce and industry from 12 Erasmus+ European countries to involve more SMEs in apprenticeship. Apprenticeship coaches in the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry were trained and equipped to help SMEs to offer quality apprenticeship placements. The project also developed a toolbox for apprenticeship coaches on how to increase apprenticeships in SMEs, and a toolkit for SMEs hosting apprentices. Both are available online.

More information at: [www.ac4sme.eu](http://www.ac4sme.eu)

Source: Cedefop.

Employer organisations and trade unions are represented in the Apprenticeship Board but are not directly involved in the design of curricula and programmes or assessment procedures. According to the interviews, they experience some obstacles in their engagement in, and ownership of, the NMA. For example, employer organisations are not informed about which of their member companies take apprentices.

The Department of Secondary Technical and Vocational Education receives stakeholder feedback on the economy's needs. A few years ago, the department organised focus groups with representatives from employer organisations, trade unions, and social partners to identify labour market skill needs. It also supports national and international projects aimed at engaging companies and learners in the NMA and meeting their needs.

### 4.3. Implementation: involving and supporting companies

The Apprenticeship Law (1966) defines the rights of employers with regard to the apprenticeship contract. There is no specific regulation on the responsibility of companies for learning content and outcomes. Most companies are small or very small, for instance family businesses, and do not have certified trainers/mentors. In most cases, the owner acts as mentor.

Companies taking apprentices must sign an apprenticeship contract, the main terms of which are outlined in the Apprenticeship Law. Companies have the right to propose differentiated terms, for example on working time. Based on the apprenticeship contract, the employer is recognised as the main supervisor of the apprentice and responsible for the apprentice's learning with respect to the agreed technical specialisation. Article 13 of the Apprenticeship Law specifies that training be provided at the workplace, at times suitable for the business and that employers of the same industry can pool resources to provide training to apprentices in one employer's establishment.

Companies are not selected based on specifically defined criteria, as students are responsible for finding an apprenticeship place themselves. It is not clear how potential apprentices can check company suitability. There are some regulatory provisions related to taking apprentices; for example, companies need to abide by health and safety regulations and provide a safe and secure work environment, as regulated by the MoLWSI. However, companies are not required to provide a mentor. There is no accreditation of companies for the NMA, nor a database of companies willing to provide apprenticeships; this information is usually available at individual school or even teacher level. Teachers helping apprentices to find a place, do an informal suitability check to see if the company has the proper infrastructure, accessible location and qualified staff.

Attracting and motivating companies to take apprentices is a problem. Currently, the NMA functions to a high degree informality. The employment situation in Cyprus is such that there is relatively little demand for skills, at least in the specialisations traditionally offered by the NMA. Labour and skill needs are currently being met, including through immigration of third-country nationals in occupations with low and middle-level qualifications. Against this backdrop, there is little need for employers to train young people and even less incentive for employers – under the current apprenticeship – to take on as apprentices young people considered to be disadvantaged

in some way, providing training that will not necessarily produce the skilled employees they need. Consequently, employers are not necessarily expected to offer anything more than work experience.

According to some reports and interviews during the review (Box 4), companies in Cyprus are hesitant to be involved in apprenticeships for several reasons:

- (a) the relatively weak economic conditions and the high unemployment following the financial crisis;
- (b) a lack of tradition among companies of investing in apprenticeships as a way to prepare skilled workers for current and future needs;
- (c) company size: many have limited human and financial resources to invest in training, for example lack of equipment, lack of qualified trainers, etc.;
- (d) the poor image and low attractiveness of apprenticeships for employers and, possibly, negative past experiences;
- (e) lack of information about apprenticeship and related procedures and responsibilities;
- (f) apprentices' low capacity to apply skills or comply with company procedures.

The main way of involving companies is through personal contacts of students, their families, VET teachers and NMA teachers. Companies usually decide if, and how many apprentices to take after they have been introduced to candidates by schools. Interviews with school representatives revealed that schools invest much energy and time to find companies and maintain good relationships. It was also suggested that employers are persuaded to take on apprentices due to: pressure from their social networks; good relationships with schools and/or VET teachers; and because the NMA provides a relatively inexpensive source of unskilled labour. Some company directors indicated an interest in providing students with technical training to explore their potential for future employment with the company, and to test and tailor the future labour force to their needs and culture – even though this does not ensure the ‘full sets of competences’ needed. Company owners or mentors who were apprentice graduates themselves treat new apprentices more positively and supportingly. According to some VET teachers and guidance counsellors, some companies exploit apprentices, thinking of them as low-paid trainees and/or cheap manpower.

There are no specific strategies or instruments to market apprenticeship to companies and inform them the benefits, responsibilities and incentives. The gap in communication among stakeholders can be partly explained

by a lack of clarity in the distribution of responsibilities of the NMA. The review's company survey found that some companies do not take apprentices because they are unfamiliar with the concept of apprenticeship. Some companies mentioned that they had never been approached by their employer organisations about apprenticeship – these were companies providing training as well as companies not involved with training. There are also sectors where skill shortages have been identified and employers might be willing to train apprentices.

#### Box 4. What companies say

The review conducted a company survey to collect employer views on apprenticeship. Some 44 company representatives replied; 26 respondents provided training to students; only eight had experience of training an apprentice.

Some of the findings are detailed below:

- most respondents supported the concept of apprenticeship as defined at EU level; only half of the respondents were informed about apprenticeship in Cyprus;
- companies would be better motivated by:
  - financial support to cover part of the apprentice and mentor wages; some would also like to have social security contributions subsidised;
  - better information on taking on apprentices and on the costs and benefits and, possibly, an award for quality training;
- better information is needed on companies' contractual responsibilities and the content of training programmes;
- apprentices in the respondents' companies can or would be able to learn all skills and competences required for the occupation they train for.

Of the companies that provide training to different students:

- almost all take students to train future staff (this concerns apprentices and students from higher education); some fill new positions and others replace employees;
- on condition that support is provided, most would be willing to take an apprentice.

Of the companies that trained apprentices, most:

- were satisfied with them;





- were willing to assign a qualified mentor;
- thought that the main benefit of taking apprentices is a better image of the company in the sector and local community;
- will continue to offer apprenticeships in the future.

*Source:* Cedefop.

There is no specific funding or incentives to engage more companies in taking apprentices<sup>(16)</sup>. The NMA has been primarily funded by the ESF since 2006. The HRDA and the CPC provided grants to companies that took apprentices between 2006 and 2013. This practice was discontinued when the MoEC took over responsibility for apprenticeship: no financial incentives for companies are foreseen in the programming period 2014-20. Some companies view costs related to the NMA as a financial burden; others see them as an investment. The lack of financial incentives, for both apprentices and companies, is seen as a significant barrier to expanding apprenticeships. For companies, financial support is crucial; respondents suggested incentives should be provided to buy equipment and subsidise apprentices' salaries, social insurance and transport expenses. Companies which take on apprentices could also be awarded more points when they apply for national or private financing for infrastructure modernisation.

As a rule, companies pay wages. Most apprentices interviewed received remuneration but amounts vary among companies and sectors. VET teachers responsible for the NMA follow up with companies to make sure that they pay apprentices and provide social insurance, and inform the Department of Labour when employers do not comply with the legal requirements. There are severe penalties for companies in cases of non-compliance. Companies would be willing to pay higher wages if there was some form of State support.

There has not been much non-financial support to companies either. Company representatives believe that more support from schools in relation to learning outcomes to be acquired at the workplace would help implementation of the NMA. Some companies would welcome recognition or an award for providing quality apprenticeships. Proper implementation of the guidelines and support materials developed by the projects can help

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<sup>(16)</sup> In fact, this is the only apprenticeship scheme of the 31 examined in a forthcoming Cedefop study on financing of apprenticeships that does not include partly funding companies or learners.

improve the situation with regard to attracting and supporting companies, including SMEs (Box 3).

#### **4.3.1. Mentors in companies**

A company taking apprentices is expected to have at least one technician or related professional in the field the apprentice is studying, to act as a mentor and supervisor. There are no formal criteria for a mentor's pedagogical competences. As many Cypriot companies are small, owners themselves often take on the role of mentor. They are usually experienced in their field and have developed managerial and pedagogical skills. Many companies do not have enough staff to supervise and advise apprentices; however, most apprentices interviewed confirmed that someone worked closely with them during their time in the company.

During the review, most respondents from the companies were owners who also acted as mentors. Most confirmed that they had developed their mentoring skills through their experience with apprentices and were not formally trained in pedagogical or transversal competences. They felt that their professional experience (and in some cases their personal experience as apprentices) had prepared them for the role of mentor. Professional development opportunities for apprentice mentors, a role considered crucial by employer organisations, have not been provided by companies so far.

Mentors assess apprentices' everyday progress and advise them on how to improve. Most mentor feedback is verbal and informal. Mentors reported that they do not have any tools to assess apprentices' learning; assessment is usually based on their performance in the work environment, for example serving customers, quality of deliverables, punctuality and behaviour. Mentors noted that they have no say in defining learning outcomes or training plans. Some teachers thought that the mentor's assessment was very important due to the close cooperation developed between a mentor and an apprentice.

#### **4.3.2. Cooperation between the learning venues**

Students in apprenticeship should alternate between learning at a technical school (two days per week) and working and learning in a company (three days per week). Both venues have distinct role and responsibilities. There are no specific formal cooperation mechanisms. Cooperation between the learning venues, technical schools and companies, is solely ensured through the NMA teacher and apprenticeship inspector visits to companies. According to interview respondents, the

apprenticeship contract sets out the responsibilities of technical schools, companies and apprentices, but in reality the contract is not always adhered to and is often seen as a mere formality.

Distribution of content and expected outcomes between company and school-based learning is not clearly defined, as a rule. There is a lack of consistency but the system is based on the assumption that schools can define the learning outcomes to be reached in companies. Most respondents, VET teachers, mentors, and apprentices, said that it is teachers who inform companies of the learning outcomes included in the curricula. Some VET teachers said that schools and companies agree – often informally – on the learning outcomes to be achieved by apprentices in the company, depending on the tasks to be completed and the learners' ability and performance.

Companies, in turn, go about their day-to-day work and assign tasks based on the daily needs of the business. Some employers noted that there is no mechanism to include business needs in the training programmes. Some VET teachers also pointed out that there is not a strong link between the expected learning outcomes as defined by the education programmes and the actual tasks apprentices perform in companies. As a result, each apprentice's experience is unique; it is unclear how these experiences are compared and assessed against the curricula. Companies have no say in defining the learning outcomes to be achieved or in assessing them. Consequently, many things are taken for granted and opinions differ (for example, schools assume that mentors assess students, while companies assume that schools prepare students to work in companies, when neither is necessarily the case). Some companies (directors and mentors) said that they are not informed about the learning outcomes students acquire at school or about the learning outcomes apprentices are expected to acquire at the workplace. They also noted that, sometimes, students cover basic knowledge in school after they have been exposed to it in the workplace. This may explain some of the concerns they have about how well schools prepare students both in terms of theoretical knowledge, and for the workplace. Adapting training to the needs and interests of companies and apprentices remains a challenge.

The VET school teacher, who is often also an apprenticeship inspector, visits the company once a month and signs the logbook. The VET teacher should report any problem recorded in the logbook to the MoEC. There is also telephone communication if problems or complaints arise. The interviews showed that inspectors do not assess the quality of the apprentice's work or the learning outcomes but mainly record the presence or absence of

apprentices at work. In some cases, inspectors, who are teachers in the same field, can assess apprentices' work. In the interviews, company representatives felt that inspections should be more frequent; there were also concerns about time allocated to teachers for visiting companies when apprentices are there.

Company mentors confirmed that they were not aware of any official document summarising the learning outcomes apprentices need to acquire while working in companies. Their formal responsibilities include signing the contract and attendance record; they are not informed about apprentices' prior learning or any learning difficulties they may have.

Most company directors reported in their interviews that, at the beginning of the apprenticeship, they gave apprentices internal training based on health and safety rules and on the basic tasks they would undertake. Some larger companies provide training rooms for apprentices to practice in and learn the basic elements of the job before they are sent to clients. Some employers/mentors said that they did not offer specific training or workshops at the beginning, but taught apprentices throughout their time at the company and during the tasks they were assigned to perform. They preferred to integrate apprentices directly into the work environment and train them as needed as they progressed. Some directors and mentors said that apprentices were fully integrated in the production process and performed at the same level as junior colleagues; others said that apprentices participated according to their abilities and believed that additional training was needed. Based on the apprenticeship professions, which are mostly technical, training usually takes place in the workplace (on the job) and not in specifically designated training rooms.

Schools organised final exams at the end of each academic year. The exams cover only the theoretical part taught in school. They are based on the school textbooks and curricula and do not include any practical part to assess the skills acquired. Practical experience is assessed formatively during the year and is part of the apprentice's final grade. Apprentices are also assessed by company mentors; this assessment is informal and is not taken into account by the school. Most stakeholder respondents highlighted that there are no specific instruments for assessing apprentices' learning outcomes in school against company-based learning outcomes and vice versa.

VET teachers see themselves as responsible only for the theoretical part, with companies responsible for the practical part of the NMA. VET teachers responsible for the NMA generally supervise implementation

of apprenticeship and have information about it; so it could be assumed that the schools act as NMA coordinators. Mentors from companies agreed that both the school and the company should be responsible for guiding apprentices towards achieving the expected learning outcomes: schools should provide the theoretical knowledge of professional learning and companies the practical experience, with schools also taking the lead in coordinating the NMA. As one mentor put it, ‘The school has the responsibility to provide knowledge to apprentices, and the company has the responsibility to implement all the knowledge acquired from school in practice.’

Overall, VET teachers responsible for the NMA are satisfied with the cooperation between the schools and companies once it has been established; the biggest challenge for them is communicating with companies to motivate them to take apprentices. Some VET teachers said that companies generally succeed in providing the training content they are responsible for. Some mentors find cooperation with the NMA teachers productive and adequate, while others find it poor and inadequate. Some mentors reported monthly face-to-face meetings with the teachers responsible for the NMA, while most communication with VET teachers was over the phone and took place mainly when a problem with the apprentice arose. Mentors would welcome more frequent visits from teachers to the companies. Meetings of mentors and teachers that involve apprentices were rare.

Company respondents also noted that there is no concrete and continuous feedback mechanism; some employers pointed out that there was no way to include business needs into training programmes. Many respondents from all groups see lack of communication as a main challenge to achieving results in apprenticeship. Training plans based on the template developed by the MoEC can potentially serve as communication tool between schools and companies, as they will be developed and agreed by both VET teachers and mentors; apprentices or their guardians will also be informed of the plan. The MoEC is developing a training plan template to support practitioners in communicating the expected learning outcomes between the learning venues.

## 4.4. Implementation: apprentices

The relationship between an apprentice and a company is regulated by the apprenticeship contract, signed by the company and the apprentice or their parent/guardian, if the learner is under 18 years old, which is the most frequent case. The terms of the apprenticeship contract are regulated by Article 18 of the Apprenticeship Law of 1966 and the current legislation on employment and social insurance. The contract specifies the apprentice rights and benefits in line with current legislation on employment and social insurance. The contract specifies the apprentice's wage and working hours, and the employer's responsibility to be available for inspections. The contract does not specify the learning outcomes to be acquired in the company. It is clearly stated that during their practical training, apprentices are recognised as employees. The apprenticeship contract is registered with the Apprenticeship Officer (Article 5 of the Apprenticeship Law of 1966) and has to be submitted no later than one month after the apprentice has started training in the company.

One main challenge is that students are responsible for finding an apprenticeship place themselves, which is made more difficult by companies' low motivation to take apprentices (Section 4.3.). This is a serious issue. During the review only half of all apprentices had a placement in a company. Vocational schools do not offer matching services and have no agreements with companies. In practice, however, vocational schools typically support students as best they can through their personal contacts with local employers, associations or chambers, or through visits to prospective employers.

Apprenticeship companies must pay apprentices wages and social security contributions. They also bear indirect costs, such as the cost of materials and mentors' time. Apprentice pay rates are set annually by the MoLWSI and agreed in the apprenticeship contract between the company and the apprentice. In 2014, the minimum weekly allowance for apprentices was EUR 87, and in 2016 EUR 85. The amount paid by the employer is a moderate contribution to apprentices' living expenses.

Apprentices said that they received remuneration. Amounts varied with most companies paying a minimum salary of EUR 70 a week; some paid higher salaries to apprentices who performed well (for example, EUR 200 a week). Company directors strongly agreed that apprentices and mentors need incentives to implement apprenticeship successfully. They would

be more willing to pay apprentices higher salaries if they received other incentives, such as tax reductions, or wage subsidies.

Apprentices do not receive any support to cover travel or meal expenses. They indicated that transportation cost can be a barrier to finding an apprenticeship placement outside their area of residence (though in Cyprus distances are relatively short, with most main cities within a two-hour drive of each other). Since the 2018/19 school year, the MoEC has been providing financial support to all apprentices to cover their transportation and meal expenses for the three days of training at the workplace (<sup>17</sup>).

There are no (minimum) requirements to access apprenticeship programmes and there is a degree of prejudice against NMA students. Student interest in NMA programmes is low, so schools do not set any requirements for enrolment. Employers do not usually set any requirements to potential apprentices either, as most work placements are found through personal contacts. As a result, schools and crafts complain that it is students with lower grades, limited choices and no motivation who enter the NMA.

Although the role of apprenticeship in providing young people with a second chance to gain key employability skills is acknowledged in several EU countries, Cyprus is unusual in that apprenticeship draws its participants almost exclusively from those who either fail to complete lower secondary education, or are identified as being at risk of failing, and so transfer to preparatory apprenticeship. Participants, therefore, are principally young people who are educationally, and often socially and economically disadvantaged; many apprentices face multiple disadvantages and require complex support measures (<sup>18</sup>). Some company mentors consider the enthusiasm of some apprentices a strong point; they referred to some apprentices as fast learners and knowledgeable young people.

Apprenticeship is not attractive to students who are, more or less, guided by schools towards the preparatory apprenticeship. The common perception among teachers and employers is that these students are not motivated, are low achievers with learning and behaviour problems, and are responsible for the system's poor performance. Motivating apprentices can be a problem, not exclusively due to their unwillingness to learn and comply with the rules. Other factors such as school attitudes, disadvantaged background and a lack of appropriate support and guidance often converge to create a challenging situation.

<sup>(17)</sup> Actions outside of the review timeframe; reported by MoEC.

<sup>(18)</sup> With the introduction of some entrance criteria, students with multiple challenges can potentially be assisted through targeted support services and programmes.

Most apprentices interviewed mentioned that they had an opportunity at the workplace to apply the knowledge they had obtained in school and to acquire new skills, but were not allowed to perform more demanding tasks related to their profession. Most apprentices started their placement with low-level tasks and progressed to more complicated tasks and responsibilities. They also reported that the knowledge acquired at school was helpful, although sometimes they felt insufficiently prepared due to a lack of variety of practical workshops at school.

Graduates interviewed noticed that they were evolving as professionals each year and that had increasing opportunity to work more independently. They were highly satisfied with their apprenticeship experience, both with the remuneration and the quality of the learning content. They also reported that they did not face any specific difficulty during their apprenticeship and that the owner of the company or mentor was the main contact person. They pointed out that they did not receive any kind of support or guidance from the school before becoming apprentices. Some graduates wanted to continue working in the same company at the end of their apprenticeship.

In 2017, the Commissioner for Children's Rights examined apprentices' situation in technical schools. The report highlighted several issues: cases of separating NMA students (who attended in the afternoon) from other students (who attended in the morning); early dismissal from classes resulting in insufficient hours to cover the curricula; truancy of teachers in NMA classes; and lack of support in finding work placements (Commissioner for Protection of Children's Rights, 2017). The MoEC is currently dealing with the issues identified (Section 3.3.). Many teachers interviewed thought that NMA students need more attention; they need to feel included and equally treated.

Teachers responsible for the NMA are the main reference point for apprentices. They inform apprentices and their parents/guardians of the rights and responsibilities of all parties, the learning outcomes, and the apprenticeship contract. They also support apprentices when problems arise. Apprentices interviewed did not report specific problems related to learning and working conditions; if they had encountered any, they said that they would have discussed and resolved them with the help of a VET teacher responsible for the NMA or a VET teacher.

There is no special mechanism to protect apprentices' rights. In case of company failure to provide training (bankruptcy, for example), the apprentice remains at school until a new placement is found.

Apprentices have access to guidance and counselling services during the NMA from guidance counsellors in VET schools. Counsellors

are hired and paid by the MoEC. Guidance counsellors cooperate with the school administration and teachers, educational psychologists and government services. At lower secondary level, they provide students with information about education options, including apprenticeships, and help students identify their personality and interests to find suitable paths for their professional and personal development. Guidance counsellors advise students with learning difficulties to join the NMA. According to the guidance counsellors interviewed, some students specifically ask about apprenticeships.

Many respondents from education and the labour market believe that guidance and career orientation should start much earlier – in elementary school. VET teachers and school directors generally agree that guidance counsellors should provide psychological support to apprentices, have regular contact with companies, and evaluate the collaboration between apprentices and mentors at the workplace. Support is being strengthened by hiring more professionals. Social workers, psychologists and staff from the MoEC's Counselling and Career Education Service visit schools and provide individualised psychosocial support, career guidance and counselling, among others. Psychologists have supported the core apprenticeship since 2015 and social workers since 2018/19; they are hired through open competition by the MoEC.

Some guidance counsellors reported cases where companies had negative experiences with apprentices not complying with workplace rules. Companies could not solve these problems alone and most of the apprentices' negative attitudes pre-dated starting their workplace experience. This points to a need for good preparation and information of all participants before an apprentice joins a workplace.

## 4.5. Enablers and challenges

The review identified some enablers in the current system that the MoEC and all national stakeholders can work with to improve the NMA, more broadly, to strengthen work-based learning in other types of VET programme. Several challenges have also been identified, some of which the MoEC and social partners are dealing with, and will, hopefully, remedy.

#### 4.5.1. Enablers

There are several enablers in the current system that can support development of the NMA:

- (a) actors' willingness and efforts to improve the NMA. The MoEC is leading the process and has already implemented several actions (Section 3.3.);
- (b) the Apprenticeship Board has already been established and its role can be clarified and expanded to achieve greater impact on the design and implementation of apprenticeships;
- (c) mechanisms are in place for social partners to provide feedback and communicate labour market needs and employer concerns over the design of the NMA, such as the Apprenticeship Board and expert working groups on curricula design;
- (d) the MoEC has the capacity to appoint teachers responsible for the NMA in districts; they have both the formal responsibility and the time required to supervise and monitor implementation;
- (e) despite challenges, both employers and apprentices recognise positive elements in their apprenticeship experience. Some companies and mentors have a positive experience in providing apprenticeships and good cooperation with the teachers responsible for the NMA. Many employers are satisfied with apprentices, whom they recruit to train as potential future employees, and because apprentices learn fast and contribute. Apprentices, despite their disadvantaged backgrounds, often seem motivated and develop professionally during their apprenticeship, asking for and assuming more complicated tasks;
- (f) ongoing and completed projects, some implemented by social partners, have made available online guidelines and tools that can support employers, in particular SMEs, who wish to engage in apprenticeship; these include a helpdesk service for SMEs with trained contact persons; handbooks for employers and for learners; and videos (Box 3).

#### 4.5.2. Challenges

Stakeholders need to address some significant challenges:

- (a) balancing the NMA's role; the initial function of preparing skilled employees seems to have lost ground to the need for social inclusion of disadvantaged learners;
- (b) ensuring quality for learning apprentices enrolled in the NMA, and the support required to address multiple disadvantages, such as learning difficulties, socioeconomic problems, motivation and choice of occupation;

- (c) finding companies willing to take apprentices is made more difficult by young apprentices being responsible for finding work placements themselves, and by the lack of formal requirements placed on companies;
- (d) raising the value of apprenticeship training and certification on the labour market and providing access to further education and training;
- (e) reducing the degree of informality in implementation and in the quality of the workplace experience;
- (f) the need to train teachers and inspectors to ensure continuous update of their knowledge and skills to train a new generation of employees.

A photograph of a man and a woman in a workshop. The man, on the left, has dark hair and is wearing a red and blue plaid shirt. He is pointing his right hand towards something off-camera with a serious expression. The woman, on the right, has blonde hair and is wearing a grey t-shirt under a grey and black safety vest overalls. She is wearing yellow ear defenders and is looking in the same direction as the man. They appear to be focused on a task or object out of frame. The background shows workshop equipment and tools.

## 5. Areas and suggestions for action

## CHAPTER 5.

# Areas and suggestions for action

Based on the findings, identified enablers and challenges, and stakeholder suggestions, this chapter outlines areas for intervention and suggests actions.

The review's key message is that policy-makers need to decide what they want to achieve with apprenticeship in Cyprus.

Initial VET at upper secondary level is required to fulfil several policy aims. While it is intended to provide the initial VET needed for young people to enter the labour market in a selected profession, in most countries it also serves a broader function. This includes equipping young people with basic skills, especially those who have experienced difficulties in the compulsory education system, and so playing an important social inclusion role by preventing young people from becoming unemployed on leaving school. This is as true for apprenticeship systems as it is for school-based VET. It is often the case in VET systems at upper secondary level, including apprenticeships, that VET students have performed relatively less well in compulsory schooling. This association with underperformance adversely affects the attractiveness of initial VET and apprenticeships for young people and employers. The situation in Cyprus is relatively extreme. As overall participation in VET is low, apprenticeships serve a much narrower group of people than in several other countries (Section 3.2.). When considering how Cyprus' apprenticeship can be made more attractive to young people, the unpopularity of IVET as whole needs to be taken into account.

Cypriot stakeholders need to agree on the function apprenticeships are expected to play in the future. For example:

- (a) scenario 1: will apprenticeship continue to be targeted exclusively at disadvantaged young people? If so, the quality of learning for the students enrolled needs to be improved in the short-term; or
- (b) scenario 2: will apprenticeship become a mainstream option at upper secondary level targeted to a diverse group of learners? This will require the redesign and expansion of apprenticeship as a mode of learning by increasing its value on the labour market. Can it become a formal model of training with enhanced cooperation between education and industry?

The starting point and a paramount objective for improving apprenticeships must be to create something of value for apprentices as well as employers. Company motivation can increase if apprenticeship provides favourable outcomes in both the short and the long term: during the course of the apprenticeship, as well as at the end, when companies can take on an employee with the exact skills they need.

Apprentice motivation can increase by providing access to employment, for example by giving apprentices the option to stay on after their training if the company wishes to hire them. Another way to motivate apprentices would be by giving them access to further learning. Apprenticeship can gain value if, on completion, apprentices receive a qualification proving to employers that they are able to perform tasks at a certain level. This way apprentices will have a qualification with labour market currency. As discussed in Chapter 4, apprenticeship in Cyprus has not achieved this goal so far. In a country where great importance is placed on the perceived value of certificates and qualifications, the apprenticeship qualification has currently little (if any) recognition and value.

Increasing the attractiveness and value of qualifications acquired through apprenticeship is linked to the training and occupational competences acquired; the apprenticeship qualification should be seen as a testament to the apprenticeship quality and the apprentices' competence. Achieving this seems to depend on the ability of technical schools and employers to provide training that leads to occupational competence. Technical schools and MoEC inspectors need to make sure that better quality training is delivered in the workplace, complementing and reinforcing the training received in technical schools. This may not be possible at present, as employers and VET teachers in technical schools are not sufficiently incentivised to bring it about. If the training element in the workplace is to succeed it will require:

- (a) balanced financial and non-financial incentives to encourage employers who currently provide apprenticeships to spend more time training apprentices, in line with the requirements of apprenticeship curricula;
- (b) incentives to increase the pool of employers willing to provide training and, in turn, the number of employers likely to recruit apprentices.

Increasing the pool of employers will require involvement of the authorities responsible for apprenticeships: they will need to identify companies with the potential to train apprentices and persuade them of the benefits of doing so. The current system, with young people expected to

find work placements themselves, puts excessive responsibility on young people, many of whom are socially and economically disadvantaged. Their social networks are unlikely to help them find a company capable of training them in their chosen profession. Consequently, technical schools and the MoEC may need to become more involved in finding employers to take on apprentices. This will also help address some of the informality inherent to apprenticeships.

Expecting employers to deliver more training may have cost implications, such as training workplace supervisors or cost of training apprentices; employers will need assistance to fulfil their commitments to apprentices. For apprenticeships to be financially viable for employers, apprentices will need to be productive to cover the cost associated with supervising them in the workplace. If an employer is to deliver more training in the workplace, with a low likelihood of the apprentice being recruited on completion of the training, then employers need to be compensated. If Cyprus wants apprenticeship to fulfil a social inclusion function and deliver more than it currently does, the State will need to ensure that those charged with fulfilling this function are suitably resourced to do so. Apart from incentives, if apprenticeship is to meet their needs to some extent, employers also need to have a say in the design of apprenticeships so that they serve their own needs, as well as those of individual apprentices and, overall the economy.

The MoEC has both the willingness and the ambition to raise the quality of the NMA and aim for scenario 2. The social partners might also support scenario 2, but the current status and image of the NMA prevents stakeholders, to some degree, from thinking differently. Their understandable scepticism about the feasibility of scenario 2 is at odds with an almost unanimously shared desire to significantly improve apprenticeships' value, quality and links to labour market needs. Concerns range from finding potential apprentices to companies' capacity to engage in apprenticeship.

Apart from the enablers outlined in Section 4.5.1, the review identified further arguments in favour of a more ambitious scenario. The prestige of apprenticeship in Cyprus was not always low. Until the 1980s, apprenticeships qualified craftspeople successfully and enrolment rates were high (Section 3.3.). The interviews and survey showed that some employers have positive attitudes towards training employees through apprenticeships, and are confident in their capacity to provide the necessary skills. Some apprentices appreciated the learning method, especially the time spent with employers. Further, the MoEC and social partners are already taking measures to make apprenticeship work. The recent success of the post-secondary VET

programmes, introduced in 2012/13 and accredited in 2017, signals the feasibility of engaging employers in cooperation with the MoEC, the HRDA and social partners to achieve quality-assured qualifications in VET.

Any choice between the two scenarios will require a set of actions to be taken. Cypriot stakeholders and decision-makers can consider the following suggestions for action, grouped into nine interconnected areas:

- (a) revising the legislation and related regulatory framework. The current Apprenticeship Law (1966) needs to be updated to reflect today's realities and strengthen governance to make it clear and comprehensive. The MoEC can consider a single regulatory framework for both the technical school and workplace components of the NMA;
- (b) improving governance and strengthening coordination:
  - (i) increasing the MoEC's capacity for coordination, with the support of the Apprenticeship Board or setting up a new coordinating unit/body;
  - (ii) improving monitoring of the apprenticeship system's performance;
  - (iii) reviewing the *modus operandi* of the Apprenticeship Board, for example through more regular meetings, expanding its role to develop content and monitor performance and strengthening its technical capacity (secretariat);
  - (iv) activating regional apprenticeship committees;
  - (v) revisiting the role and ways of involving parents in governance, implementation and support processes; providing support to parents;
- (c) involving social partners in programme design, curriculum development, and assessment, assigning a more active and responsible role to employers and their representatives to:
  - (i) revise and update curricula with the participation of employers and their representative organisations, and agree on how to define the content of learning in companies;
  - (ii) bring about closer alignment between labour market needs and the selection of specialisations to be studied/worked towards;
  - (iii) strengthen cooperation between schools and companies;
  - (iv) create and/or maintain a database of available work placements for apprentices;
  - (v) consider taking responsibility for helping students find a placement;
  - (vi) develop a business case and key messages to communicate to employers;

- (d) increasing the value of apprenticeship through better opportunities to follow further education and training strands and levels, and improve transition to the labour market by:
  - (i) setting minimum criteria for learners to enter apprenticeship;
  - (ii) assisting with the school-to-work transition so that the apprenticeship certificate (qualification) provides direct entry to a profession or occupation;
  - (iii) ensuring that the sectors covered by apprenticeships reflect the structure of employment in Cyprus and the changing pattern of the demand for skills;
  - (iv) refining the enrolment policy and procedure for a more flexible approach (i.e. not waiting for general education to be completed), especially for occupations with a high skill demand;
  - (v) improving the quality of training delivered in the workplace to meet predefined goals set out in the curriculum and/or in occupational standards; if necessary, adjusting the balance between the time spent in a technical school and the time spent with an employer. If it proves too difficult to engage employers to deliver more training, this need will have to be met by technical schools;
  - (vi) harmonising the curricula with occupational standards: comparing the training programmes of the NMA with the SVQ occupational standards developed by HRDA; exploring the feasibility of explicit referencing in the HRDA guide of policy and procedures;
  - (vii) encouraging employers to take part in guidance activities locally (visits to schools and companies);
- (e) informing and preparing potential apprentices by:
  - (i) setting (minimum) criteria for entering apprenticeship;
  - (ii) improving early guidance to enable informed choices by learners/ would-be apprentices and their parents;
  - (iii) strengthening the ties with lower secondary schools, improving information available to counsellors and elementary school principals about the NMA;
- (f) preparing teachers and other professionals to work in apprenticeship programmes taking into account the specificities of the NMA by;
  - (i) informing and educating teachers to develop positive attitudes towards the NMA and their students and increase their motivation to work with apprentices;
  - (ii) managing the expectations of teachers recruited/assigned to work in the NMA and fostering their professional development;

- (iii) encouraging team work with other professionals;
- (iv) familiarising VET teachers with occupational standards;
- (v) involving the PIC and employer organisations in providing training to VET teachers, and schools in training mentors in companies;
- (g) introducing more structure/a framework into the system to address the issue of informality:
  - (i) through legal or regulatory provisions but also an to a greater extent through guidelines, handbooks, helpdesk services on how to achieve what is required and expected of all actors, especially, employers, including deliverables from projects that developed some valuable tools;
  - (ii) by clarifying the role and increasing the capacity of apprenticeship inspectors to monitor the progress of apprentices more effectively, including the learning outcomes;
- (h) increasing attractiveness of apprenticeship for employers through a balanced combination of financial and non-financial support by;
  - (i) informing, attracting, preparing and/or training companies to take on apprentices (including provision of incentives);
  - (ii) creating a pool of 'champions/ambassadors' of apprenticeship and disseminating their experience and testimonials in various formats and through appropriate channels;
  - (iii) identifying and working with employers with a potential to train apprentices, such as those willing to take apprentices or expressing urgent need for employees in occupations covered by the NMA, including expanding the NMA offer;
  - (iv) creating a publicly accessible database of companies providing apprenticeship places in cooperation with social partners;
  - (v) exploring the possibility for companies to apply for HRDA funding to train apprentices using existing schemes for training employees;
  - (vi) establishing more structured communication and exchange of information between schools and employers and between teachers and mentors by providing guidelines and/or templates outlining the content of such communication, including giving feedback to apprentices;
  - (vii) ensuring guidance and methodological support to employers in training apprentices (content, methods and techniques) rather than requirements and pressure; seminars for employers/mentors with support from the PIC;

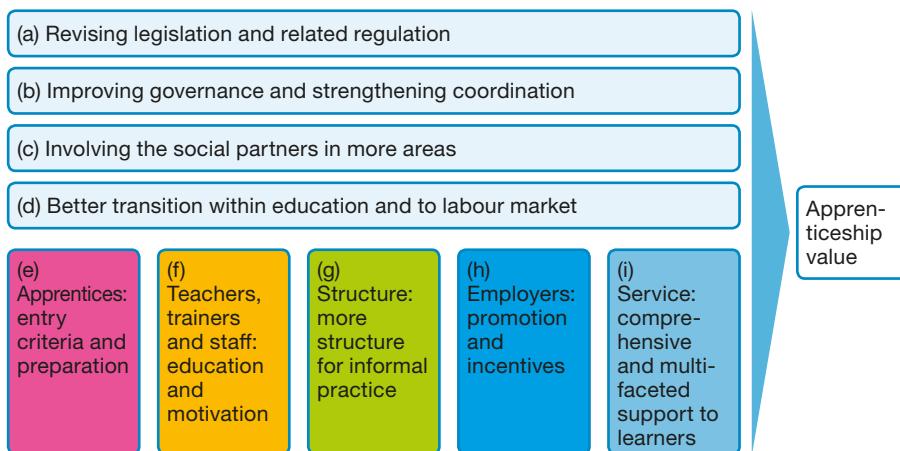
- (viii) encouraging schools (teachers responsible) to provide more support to employers on training issues; increasing the number of teacher visits to companies (addressing the issue of the workload and timing as discussed in Section 4.3.2.) and ensuring appropriate framework conditions;
- (ix) helping companies to understand the importance and benefit of trainers with good pedagogical competences (this can be seen as a bonus or a return on the investment from participating in apprenticeships). Setting up a short training programme/seminar for in-company (potential) mentors to prepare them to work with apprentices: informing them about the content/curricula; pedagogical methods and approaches; and problem-solving;
- (x) developing and introducing assessment that captures the progress of the apprentice in the workplace, and including in-company mentors' input in the overall assessment process both in formative and final stages. Considering formalising mentors' assessment of apprentices;
- (xi) targeted support and guidance for employers on how to work with apprentices with special learning needs; providing information about students before they start the work placement, developing methodological materials and providing practical support;
- (xii) promoting a helpdesk service to SMEs (Box 3) and train all social partner and Apprenticeship Board member organisations to contribute to running the service for companies, students, parents and guardians;
- (xiii) considering an award for companies and/or their mentors who provide quality training;
- (i) ensuring comprehensive and multifaceted support for apprentices before, during and after their studies:
  - (i) relieving learners from finding a work place themselves; considering the school or chamber/professional associations taking up the responsibility to formally deal with finding companies that would take apprentices;
  - (ii) recruiting teachers with the responsibility of identifying and securing placements for students in the NMA;
  - (iii) reviewing and considering the feasibility of redistributing content and learning time between school and company, i.e. decide to increase training in schools or in companies over time; more school

learning could help students develop better basic skills and prepare them to work in companies (¹⁹);

- (iv) ensuring that NMA students have sufficient access to technical school workshops and that workshop time is used appropriately;
- (v) providing financial support to apprentices to cover travel/transportation cost or arrangements, meals (in school) and, possibly, part of a wage/grant.

Figure 2 shows how acting on any or all of these areas will help increase the value of apprenticeship, subject to the extent of intervention. Actions in areas (e) to (i) are necessary in any scenario, as they concern implementing the NMA and address the challenges in its current role and arrangement. These actions should ensure quality learning experiences and outcomes for current apprentices and should be put into practice in the short term. Actions in areas (a) to (d) are of transversal nature (at framework level) and the extent and magnitude of intervention can significantly increase the value of apprenticeship and contribute to realising scenario 2.

**Figure 2. Increasing the value of apprenticeship in Cyprus**



<sup>(¹⁹)</sup> This course of action may not be sufficiently attractive to young people at whom apprenticeships are currently aimed. There is, for example, *prima facie* evidence that apprentice attendance at technical schools is highly unsatisfactory. There is no guarantee that apprentices would agree to increased technical school attendance, which might risk further absenteeism.





## 6. Concluding remarks

# Concluding remarks

Evidence collected in the study reveals that the apprenticeship operates in a specific way – not necessarily in the way it was designed – as incentives are insufficient for the actors involved to behave in the way the system anticipated. Employers train with no intention to recruit the apprentices once training is completed; apprentices do not receive a certificate that gives them access to the profession in which they are training; and the technical schools feel powerless to influence the behaviour of employers or apprentices. There seem to be relatively few levers that can be pulled to ensure that behaviour conforms to what was envisaged in the original design of the NMA.

Reforming the NMA requires considering several actions. These have been suggested after careful consideration of their feasibility and the possibility of implementing them in a reasonable time frame. Which actions are adopted will depend on how the relevant authorities want to develop the NMA. Whatever the decision, some kind of action is required; doing nothing is not an option. If the NMA is to continue to serve relatively disadvantaged young people, then action is needed to ensure that it equips them with skills that have value in the labour market. It needs to offer them a way to enter the labour market with skills that will give them opportunity for progression, or at least help them remain in employment.

Since the conclusion of the review, the MoEC and social partners have taken several actions that can potentially solve some of the challenges identified. Taking Cyprus' context into account, the country's stakeholders will need to decide if and how to take the review's suggestions forward.

# Abbreviations

<b>AF</b>	analytical framework
<b>ALMPMs</b>	active labour market policy measures
<b>CPC</b>	Cyprus Productivity Centre
<b>CPD</b>	continuous professional development
<b>CSR</b>	country specific recommendations
<b>CVET</b>	continuing vocational education and training
<b>EAfA</b>	European alliance for apprenticeship
<b>EQAVET</b>	European quality assurance in VET
<b>EQF</b>	European qualifications framework
<b>ESF</b>	European Social Fund
<b>ET</b>	education and training
<b>HRDA</b>	Human Resources Development Authority
<b>ISCED</b>	International Standard Classification of Education
<b>IVET</b>	initial vocational education and training
<b>LAU</b>	local administrative units
<b>LM</b>	labour market
<b>MoLWSI</b>	Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance
<b>MoEC</b>	Ministry of Education and Culture
<b>MS</b>	Member States
<b>NEET</b>	not in employment, education or training
<b>NMA</b>	new modern apprenticeship
<b>NQF</b>	national qualifications framework
<b>PIC</b>	Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>SG</b>	steering group
<b>SMEs</b>	small and medium-sized enterprises
<b>STVE</b>	secondary technical and vocational education
<b>SVQ</b>	system of vocational qualifications
<b>TCR</b>	thematic country reviews
<b>VET</b>	vocational education and training
<b>WBL</b>	work-based learning

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# Annex

Table A1. Cedefop thematic country reviews on apprenticeships:  
analytical framework used for this review

Areas of analysis	Operational descriptors
1. Distinguishing features	Systematic long-term training alternating periods at the workplace and in an education and training institution or training centre that leads to a qualification.
	An apprentice is contractually linked to the employer and receives remuneration (wage).
	An employer is responsible for the company-based part of the programme.
2. Place in the ET system	Apprenticeship is defined and regulated in a legal framework.
	Position of apprenticeship in relation to other learning paths is clear.
	Apprenticeship offers both horizontal and vertical pathways to further specialisation or education at all levels.
3. Governance structures	Roles and responsibilities of key players (the State, employer organisations, trade unions, chambers, schools, VET providers, companies) at national, regional, local levels are clearly defined and distributed: decision-making, implementation, advisory, control.
	Employer organisations and trade unions are actively engaged at all levels.
	Employer organisations, trade unions, and companies understand and recognise the importance of apprenticeship for a skilled labour force (social responsibility).
	One coordination and decision-making body is nominated.

<b>Areas of analysis</b>	<b>Operational descriptors</b>
4. Training content and learning outcomes	Qualification standards and/or occupational profiles exist, are based on learning outcomes and are regularly evaluated and updated.
	Curricula and programmes are developed based on qualification standards and/or occupational profiles.
	The content, duration and expected outcomes of company and school-based learning are clearly distributed and form a coherent sequence.
	There are provisions for adjusting part of curricula to local labour market needs.
	(Minimum) requirements to access apprenticeship programmes are stipulated.
	Final assessment covers all learning outcomes and is independent of the learning venues.
5. Cooperation among learning venues	There is cooperation, coordination and clear distribution of responsibilities among the venues as well as established feedback mechanisms.
	A school, a company and an apprentice together develop a training plan, based on the curriculum.
	If a company cannot ensure the acquisition of all required learning outcomes for the company-based learning as defined by the curriculum, there are arrangements to compensate for that (such as intercompany training centres, cooperation of companies).
	One of the venues takes up the coordinating role in the process (designated by law).
	It is clear who is responsible for the administrative tasks related to the company-based part of the programme (such as checking the suitability of the accredited training enterprise, technically and personnel-wise, logging of apprenticeship contracts).

<b>Areas of analysis</b>	<b>Operational descriptors</b>
6. Participation of and support to companies	Rights and obligations of companies providing training are legally stipulated.
	There are strategies, initiatives in marketing apprenticeship and informing companies of benefits of taking apprentices, related responsibilities and available incentives.
	There are minimum requirements for companies willing to provide apprenticeship places and/or an accreditation procedure.
	Companies, especially SMEs, receive non-financial support to implement apprenticeship.
	There is recognition, and even awards, for companies that provide quality apprenticeships.
	Employer organisations play a key role in engaging and supporting companies.
7. Requirements and support to teachers and in-company trainers	Companies have to assign a qualified staff member (tutor) to accompany apprentices.
	There are stipulated requirements for qualification and competences of an apprentice tutor.
	An apprentice tutor in a company has to have a qualification in the vocation he/she trains for.
	An apprentice tutor in a company has to have some proof of pedagogical/didactic competence.
	There is a provision of training for in-company trainers to develop and update their pedagogical/didactic and transversal competences and for teachers to update their technical competences.
	There are mechanisms for cooperation and exchange between in-company trainers and VET teachers in schools.
	There is a clear indication of who (teacher or trainer) has ultimate responsibility for apprentices' learning.

<b>Areas of analysis</b>	<b>Operational descriptors</b>
8. Financing and cost-sharing mechanisms	Apprenticeship companies pay wages and cover indirect costs (materials, trainers' time).
	The State is responsible for financing VET schools and/or paying grants to engage apprentices.
	The duration and organisation of apprenticeships allow companies to recover the investment through apprentices' work.
	There are incentives (subsidies, tax deductions) to encourage companies to take on apprentices, generally and/or in specific sectors or occupations.
	Employer organisations and trade unions cover part of the costs (direct and/or indirect).
9. Quality assurance	Quality assurance system covers apprenticeship.
10. Apprentice's working and learning conditions	Rights and obligations of apprentices are legally stipulated, both for working and learning.
	There is a reference point (responsible body) that informs the apprentice of rights and responsibilities of all parties and supports him/her in case of problems.
	An apprentice has an employment contract with the company and enjoys all rights and benefits of an employee and fulfils all responsibilities.
	An apprentice is protected in the case of company failure (bankruptcy, for example) to provide training.
	An apprentice has access to guidance and counselling services.
11. Responsiveness to labour market	There are institutional procedures that allow apprenticeship to respond to or to anticipate the needs of the labour market.
	Outputs and outcomes of apprenticeship are regularly monitored and evaluated.
	<i>Ex-ante</i> and/or <i>ex-post</i> impact evaluation of apprenticeship are in place.

Source: Cedefop.

**Table A2. Comparing the ‘old’ and the new modern apprenticeship**

Main characteristics	‘Old’ apprenticeship system	NMA, core apprenticeship
<b>Legal basis</b>	Law 13/1966 the Apprenticeship Law of 1966	Law 13/1966 the Apprenticeship Law of 1966, but there is an intention to set a new legal framework reflecting the recent reforms in the NMA.
<b>Main responsibility</b>	Cyprus Productivity Centre (2007-15)	Ministry of Education and Culture (as of 2015)
<b>Type of apprenticeship</b>	Dual apprenticeship, alternation between school-based training and in-company training	Dual apprenticeship, alternation between school-based training and in-company training
<b>Referencing to ISCED and EQF</b>	ISCED 3, EQF level 3	ISCED 2A, EQF level 3
<b>Duration and distribution of time</b>	Two academic years, including theoretical and practical training and work placement. The workplace training is three days per week and two days per week are spent at school.	Three academic years, divided into six terms. The workplace training is three days per week and two days per week are spent at school.
<b>Target groups</b>	Young people, 15 to 20 years old.	The NMA primarily targets 15-year-olds in the final year of lower secondary school, in order to attract students who are interested in a profession to participate in IVET. It is also open to early school leavers from grades 8-10 (14 years old).
<b>Curricula and specialisations</b>	Curricula and technical specialisations were based on the offers and provisions of the secondary VET schools.	Existing curricula were revised and updated. New curricula are developed by the MOEC.
<b>Minimum number of students to start a programme</b>	10-12 students	Six students

Main characteristics	'Old' apprenticeship system	NMA, core apprenticeship
<b>School-based learning: morning or afternoon</b>	Only mornings	Under specific conditions, courses can also be delivered in the afternoon.
<b>Qualifications</b>	On successful completion, a certificate of completion of apprenticeship was provided. It is a professional, not an educational qualification.	On successful completion, a certificate of completion of apprenticeship is provided. It is a professional, not an educational qualification; it gives access to some occupations under conditions.
<b>Financing</b>	School-based training was funded by the ESF and the Cypriot Government. In-company training was funded by the employer.	School-based training is funded by the ESF and the Cypriot Government. In-company training is funded by the employer.
<b>Counselling and psychosocial support</b>	Not applicable	Psychologists and social workers visit VET schools and offer learners who face problems counselling sessions and support.
<b>Progression opportunities</b>	General secondary education (EQF Level 4)	VET at upper secondary level: young people who complete the core apprenticeship successfully can move to an evening vocational school, for a further two-year cycle (instead of the four years of regular school-based programmes); at the end, they receive a formal upper secondary qualification (evening technical schools, EQF level 4) that grants access to post-secondary VET or higher education.











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# APPRENTICESHIP REVIEW CYPRUS

Adding value: rethinking apprenticeships



This report presents key findings and suggestions to improve apprenticeship for learners and employers and increase its attractiveness for economy and society in Cyprus. Based on information provided by apprentices, teachers, institutional actors, social partners and policy-makers, the review examines the country's new modern apprenticeship (*νέα σύγχρονη μαθητεία*), which provides an alternative education pathway for students who have completed compulsory education or a preparatory apprenticeship. Improvements have been and are being made to the new modern apprenticeship, but national policy-makers need to decide which role they want apprenticeships to play in the Cypriot education and training system. This publication is the final report of Cedefop's review of apprenticeship in Cyprus, carried out between January 2017 and June 2018 at the request of the Ministry of Education and Culture. This review of apprenticeship is one of several carried out by Cedefop at the request of various Members States.

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